

Title: Kant, the practical postulates and Clifford's principle

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Abstract: In this paper I argue that Kant would have agreed with Clifford's famous principle, "It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone to believe anything on insufficient evidence." I begin by confronting (and trying to explain away) the strongest evidence against my thesis: Kant's argument for the practical postulates. I then introduce what I take to be strong evidence in favor of my thesis: Kant's views on lying. To that end, the paper has three main sections.

In the first section, I reconstruct Kant's famous argument for the practical postulates. According to this argument, although there are no theoretical grounds for (or against) belief in God, immortality or freedom, there are practical grounds in favor of all three of these. In particular, Kant maintains that (1) there is a duty to promote the highest good; (2) ought implies can; and (3) it is possible to promote the highest good if but only if there is a God, immortality and freedom. From these three premises, according to Kant, it follows that there are practical grounds for believing in what is beyond the ken of speculative reason. That is, the duty to promote the highest good yields non-theoretical reasons to believe in God, immortality and freedom. The key step in the argument for my purposes, however, is what comes next: Kant moves from the presence of practical grounds in the absence of theoretical grounds to the conclusion that we ought to believe in God, immortality and freedom. This seems to be a direct contradiction of Clifford's principle and, thus, it seems directly to contradict my thesis.

In the second section, I argue that Kant's argument about the practical postulates foreshadowed the development of the moral encroachment theory of justification on the part of modern pragmatists. Moreover, I argue that with a proper understanding of Kant's argument on hand, it may be seen that the practical postulates are actually consistent with Clifford's principle.

But showing that the practical postulates are consistent with Clifford's principle is a far cry from showing that Kant would have upheld this principle. Thus, in the third and final section I turn to Kant's views on lying. I begin with his views on lying to others before turning to his views about self-deception. I argue that Kant's views on lying provide positive evidence *in favor* of my thesis, whence I conclude, having defanged what is often taken to be the most serious evidence *against* my thesis, that there are good grounds for maintaining that Kant would have upheld Clifford's principle.